

News Release



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The California Main Street Program

A Proven Record of Downtown Revival

Dozens of California towns and cities have reversed the deterioration of their historic downtown areas with the help of The California Main Street Program. Now celebrating its 20th Anniversary, the program has been one of the most effective tools for revitalizing the brick, mortar and economies of the downtown commercial cores of communities all across the state.

"The success of this program cannot be overstated," said Milford Wayne Donaldson, State Historic Preservation Officer and chief of the Office of Historic Preservation for California State Parks. "We have seen this program spark tremendous local efforts, in reenergizing and revitalizing the main streets of many towns and communities. No other program that I know of," added Donaldson, "has created such an effective grass-roots effort toward revitalizing our historic downtowns."

The California Main Street Program began in 1986. During the first year, the state program began with five demonstration towns: Petaluma, Fort Bragg, Sonoma, Porterville, and Vista. There are currently 37 certified Main Street communities, such as Grass Valley, San Luis Obispo, Hollister, and Benicia, with an even longer list of communities aspiring to become certified California Main Street communities.

Ruth Coleman, Director of California State Parks, likewise praised the results coming from the program. "The California Main Street Program," said Coleman, "is a natural partner with State Parks due to its joint effort of both preserving and revitalizing historic downtown areas. That effort has brought back the historic beauty of downtown core areas and improved both the economy and the quality of life for those communities."

Coleman will be keynote speaker at the 2006 winter California Main Street meetings which will be held in Sacramento on February 27 and 28. Donaldson and Anthea Hartig, Director of the western regional office of the National Trust of Historic Preservation, will also speak at the meetings. On the evening of February 27, there will be a dinner to celebrate the anniversary.

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The successful nationwide program was begun by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1981 and is celebrating its 25th anniversary. Some 39 states have similar programs. Some are in non-profits and others are in state agencies. Most receive state funding, as well as funding from other sources, to provide technical assistance to the local Main Street communities and to communities wanting to become Main Street communities.

As an economic stimulant, the Main Street Program is a solid investment. Private studies show that for every dollar invested in Main Street programs, an additional seven dollars is invested in the community by private interests. Nationwide, Main Street programs are responsible for \$17 billion in investments, 231,682 additional jobs, and 93,734 building rehabilitations since 1980.

In California, the program is a proven economic revitalization program to preserve and to enhance the vital downtown cores and neighborhoods of cities large and small, making the best of the historic buildings and individual character of the communities. It has helped revitalize neighborhoods in cities, such as San Diego, Los Angeles, and Oakland, and in smaller cities, such as Davis, Fairfield, Hanford and Salinas. The Main Street Program is a cornerstone of smart growth and sustainability policies.

A 2001 survey report of California Main Street communities, funded by the James Irvine Foundation, showed dramatic economic improvements for downtown areas. Of those communities in the program seven years or more, the net number of businesses in the main street areas increased by 24%, the net number of jobs increased by 31%, retail sales increased by 105%, and commercial property values increased by 167%.

Since the unfunded California Main Street Program was reestablished in the Office of Historic Preservation in 2004 by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the office has been working in partnership with the California Main Street Alliance, a volunteer non-profit, to continue the efforts of the program.

California Main Street Alliance President Emily Low, who is the director of the Fairfield Main Street Program said, "The support and mentoring available for communities through the California Main Street Program are critical elements of any economic revitalization strategy. California Main Street communities lead the charge for revitalizing historic downtowns while savoring and protecting their historic buildings".

Recently, Donaldson announced that the City of Redding has been selected as the first model California Main Street community since the program was reestablished in the Office of Historic Preservation last year. The mayor of Redding, John R. Mathena, stated that the city was excited to be part of the renaissance of the California Main Street Program and looked forward to working with Viva Downtown, the non-profit revitalization organization.

More information on the program and Main Street communities can be found on the Office Historic Preservation website: www.ohp.parks.ca.gov and the California Main Street Alliance website: www.californiamainstreet.org.

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